

The other issue that is going to be brought before us very quickly is the whole question of a tax cut. There is nothing more popular for a politician to suggest than: I am going to cut your taxes. Frankly, I believe there should be a tax cut in light of the enormous surpluses which our good economy, as well as the policies and programs of the last few years, is generating. We have created a system where, for the first time, we are paying down the national debt. That has not happened for 30 years. We are dealing with balanced budgets and paying down the debt. But make no mistake, we are still at this point in time dealing with a huge national debt.

I called this morning to the Department of the Treasury to ask them what is our current debt. They gave me the debt of America as of today. When you add that debt together here is what it comes to: \$5,728,195,796,181. That is the accumulated debt of America that we currently have to pay off.

How do we pay it off? We reduce it as long as we are running surpluses and don't spend them on something else. But each day in America we collect \$1 billion in taxes from wage earners, from families, from businesses, from farmers, and that money is used exclusively to pay interest on the old debt. It does not build a new school. It doesn't educate a child. It does not buy us any tanks or guns or planes. It is used to pay interest on old debt.

Many of us believe, in the discussion of what to do with the surplus, we should not lose sight of the most important single thing we can do, and that is eliminate this debt burden which we are passing on to the next generation. To celebrate a tax cut and ignore this, I think is to ignore the reality of what our children and grandchildren will face. I hope we can have a balanced approach with this surplus.

First be sensible. Don't assume, because some economists can think ahead 4 and 5 years, or even 10, and say, oh, you are going to have a surplus forever, that that is gospel truth. These economists tend to disagree all of the time. We have to be careful that we do not overestimate the projected surplus, be careful in how much money we think we will have. Then, once we have that money, we have to allocate at least a third of it to reducing the national debt so we do not have to collect all these taxes to pay interest on old debts which previous generations have incurred.

Second, we have to make sure we invest enough in Social Security and Medicare so that these systems will not go bankrupt. Mr. President, 40 million-plus Americans depend on these systems to sustain them, and Social Security payments, to make sure they have quality health care—seniors and disabled Americans. If we have a surplus lets make sure we invest from our surplus into Social Security and Medicare for that purpose.

Finally, of course, I support a tax cut. The Democrats and Republicans

both support tax cuts. My take on it may be a little different than that of some of my colleagues. I do not believe the tax cuts should go to the wealthiest people in America. I happen to think we ought to focus on struggling working families. I listen to the telephone calls coming into my office in Chicago and Springfield and Marion, IL. I can tell you right now with what families are struggling. They are struggling to pay heating bills. Families have seen a dramatic increase in their heating bills in the Midwest. They have seen a dramatic increase over the last several years in the costs of college education. They are facing ongoing increases in the costs of child care. Any working parent wants to leave that son or daughter in the hands of qualified people. Yet it becomes increasingly expensive for them to pay for day care.

I receive telephone calls and read letters where people say: Senator, I have reached a point where my family is doing well but my parent now is reaching a point where he—or she—needs more and more attention and care. We are glad to give it, but it is expensive. Can you help us with that?

When you are talking about long-term care, when you are talking about child care, when you are talking about the expenses to put someone through college or even the expenses of heating your home, the average working family is struggling to make ends meet. When we talk about a tax cut, let us focus on helping those families first. The wealthiest in America are doing OK. They will continue to do fine. They may have a tax cut but it should not be at the expense of working families.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time of the Senator has expired.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Chair recognizes the Senator from New Mexico.

IMPROVING SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I rise first to speak about one of the critical pieces of education legislation that the Congress is scheduled to consider this year. I believe we have wide agreement, now, on the need to increase school accountability, with new systems that will put real teeth into improving school performance for all students, and school districts, and for each State.

I have spoken for several years, now, about the need to improve school accountability. I introduced school accountability legislation in 1999. Presi-

dent Bush has spoken frequently about it. His new Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, whom we confirmed on Saturday, has spoken about its importance.

I believe there is strong support from those colleagues, both Democrat and Republican, on the HELP committee. The provisions that we developed this last year to ensure accountability are included in S. 7, which Senator DASCHLE introduced yesterday.

In addition, I am introducing later today a bipartisan bill which contains those same accountability provisions. I am very pleased that my colleague and friend, Senator LUGAR from Indiana, has joined me as a cosponsor of that bill. This will be a bipartisan effort which will demonstrate the bipartisan nature of these proposals.

These accountability provisions demand results of all students so the existing achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, between poor and wealthier students, between limited English and English-speaking students, are eliminated and they are eliminated at the individual school level, at the school district level, and at the State level.

Mr. President, I do believe there is now widespread consensus on the need for rigorous school accountability in key areas that are addressed in this bill that Senator LUGAR and I are introducing.

The bill establishes aggressive performance objectives for all students that are linked to each school's standards and assessments. It directs resources to the students and objectives most in need. It provides for significant consequences for failure so that States and school districts must take full responsibility for turning around those schools that have chronically failed to adequately educate the students in the schools.

Our bill provides maximum flexibility for educators to develop strategies to meet the basic goals of school improvement, and it ensures that every class have a fully qualified teacher. The bill provides an expanded role for parents. Finally, the bill provides new funding for school improvement strategies that have been proven to work. These are strategies such as the Success for All Program, which Senator LUGAR and I strongly support.

I am very pleased that school accountability is finally getting the attention it deserves in Congress from both sides of the aisle. With widespread agreement now on the need for strong school accountability legislation—and sanctions for schools that do not live up to basic standards—I am very optimistic that this Congress can move quickly to develop a consensus package. I believe this bipartisan bill I referred to can serve as a starting point for working with the White House and with all colleagues on this vital area of meeting the needs of our schoolchildren.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, but I indicate I do want to speak as in morning business at some time after the majority leader speaks to pay tribute to our former colleague, Senator Cranston.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, point of clarification: Senator BINGAMAN was not suggesting that he would speak immediately after Senator LOTT; is that correct?

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, in deference to the other people who are here and waiting, I will certainly wait until they conclude their statements.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair recognizes the majority leader.

Mr. LOTT. I thank the Senator from New Mexico for offering to yield time earlier.

Mr. President, I ask that my time be taken from my leader time so it will not count against the time that was made available for this debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

EDUCATION

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, we have a new President of the United States who has proven in his own State of Texas and in his life—and with the encouragement of his wife—that he really cares about education and that he means it when he says we should leave no child behind.

We need an education system in America that is focused on one thing, and that is children learning. I am convinced he means that. I have had occasion to hear him talk about that in Texas, on the campaign trail, after the election, and even yesterday in the first meeting, when the bicameral Republican leadership met with the President, that was his focus. He made it clear he was going to reach out to the Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, and to outsiders to try to get a consensus as to how we want to move our country. But the issue he focused on was education.

I believe that is going to be well received by the American people. People of all backgrounds, races, creeds, color, regions know that for continued advancement for the American culture, education and improving education is absolutely critical.

He continues to focus on this issue. This morning he met with the leaders of the appropriate committees to talk about his proposal that he is going to send to us today. I have spoken to a couple of those who attended that meeting, including Senator JEFFORDS. A moment ago, when the Senator from Vermont, the chairman of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, spoke, I felt there was an exuberance in him about the fact that this President is opening his administration the way he said he would, and in the Senate we are picking up that mantle. The bill that will carry the number S. 1 is going to be about education.

Today the President of the United States will keep his promise to America's schoolchildren. He will articulate for the Nation a vision of America, a public school system that serves the children and leaves no child behind.

I think it is important also that he is not going to send us a bill drafted with every word, every dot and comma, but he is going to lay out the provisions, the major points he intends to pursue, and he is asking us to pursue it legislatively in the Congress.

Under President Bush, our public schools can and will be doorways to opportunity. In Texas, he has proven that every child, particularly our disadvantaged children, can excel. As President, he will bring that same determination to all of our Nation's children.

The President proposed we apply commonsense principles to promote results. He also has picked an outstanding nominee to be Secretary of Education, and now he is the Secretary of Education, Dr. Rod Paige. By the way, I should note he is a native Mississippian. He grew up with a very blue-collar upbringing. He attended public schools. He got a good education. He was the head coach at Jackson State University in Jackson, MS, a university that has produced some outstanding academic leaders and athletic leaders in this country. Some of the most outstanding football players in the history of this country came out of Jackson State University.

He went beyond that. He got his postgraduate degrees. He got his doctorate, and then he went to the Houston, TX, school system, a school system that had all kinds of problems, that was deteriorating, declining, and he said: We are going to make this place work. We are going to provide different ideas, innovative ideas, and he produced results. Now he is going to be the Nation's Secretary of Education. Here again is a man who has shown the American dream is alive and well. When you look at his humble beginnings and what he did in terms of getting an education in public schools, at Jackson State University, and then getting his postdoctorate degrees and now is Secretary of Education, it is a tremendous testament to what can be done.

Our schools should be measured by what our children learn. I have said on this floor many times that I am the son of a schoolteacher, a lady who taught school for 19 years. I am very proud of it. She still corrects my grammar when I use the wrong word, the wrong tense in my weekly columns or when she hears me speak. If I speak improperly, she will mark my paper in red or chastise me. I am proud of that.

Unfortunately, like a lot of teachers, after 14 years she left and went into bookkeeping and even radio announcing because she could make more money. That is a tragedy, too. At the local and State level, we have to make sure we pay our people a livable wage so they will stay in teaching and not

go out into other places and get more money but maybe not much reward in terms of what they actually produce.

I went to public schools all my life. So did my wife and so did my children. I remember distinctly the best teachers I ever had in my life were my teachers in the second, third, and fourth grades at Duck Hill, MS. Those teachers affected my life. They taught me the basics. They taught me to read.

By the way, I stayed in touch with two of the three all my life. One of them now is deceased. One of them I still hear from every now and then. They came from a small poor school, but they made a difference in my whole life, more than my college professors, more than my high school teachers.

We have to make sure we have that for every child in America.

No child—no child—in America should be trapped in failing schools just because they lack the economic means to have a choice or to make sure they do get a good education.

We have to be prepared to think outside the box. What we have been doing is not working in every school. Some schools are fantastic. In my own State, we have some great schools. We have students who make tremendous test scores on the ACT and SAT, and yet we have schools where children are just not getting a quality education. They are not learning. They are not safe. They are in danger from all kinds of things in these schools. So we have to keep the good ones good and make them even better, but we have to make sure those other schools can be brought up. That is a local responsibility, a State responsibility.

But, yes, the Federal Government has a role to play. There are many things we can do to be helpful in that area. The President's proposals will help us address that. The fact that he is willing to put money—and a significant amount of money—into children learning to read, that is a beginning, that is where it all starts.

We have one couple in my State of Mississippi who have been remarkably successful in their lives: Jim Barksdale and his wife Sally, from Jackson, MS. They went to the University of Mississippi. Jim Barksdale worked with FedEx. He worked with McCaw Telephone in Washington State. He is one of the founders of Netscape who made a lot of money, and now he is on the board of AOL Time Warner. He and his wife just gave \$100 million—\$100 million—of personal money, the two of them, for one thing, and only one thing, in my State—4th grade reading. The State said, OK, can we join in on this? And others said, no, we want this to be focused on teaching those 4th grade students to read. That is the kind of thing happening with individuals in the private sector. They have a responsibility to help with education, too.

So we need to really build on that. Parents have a right to hold schools to high standards and know that their